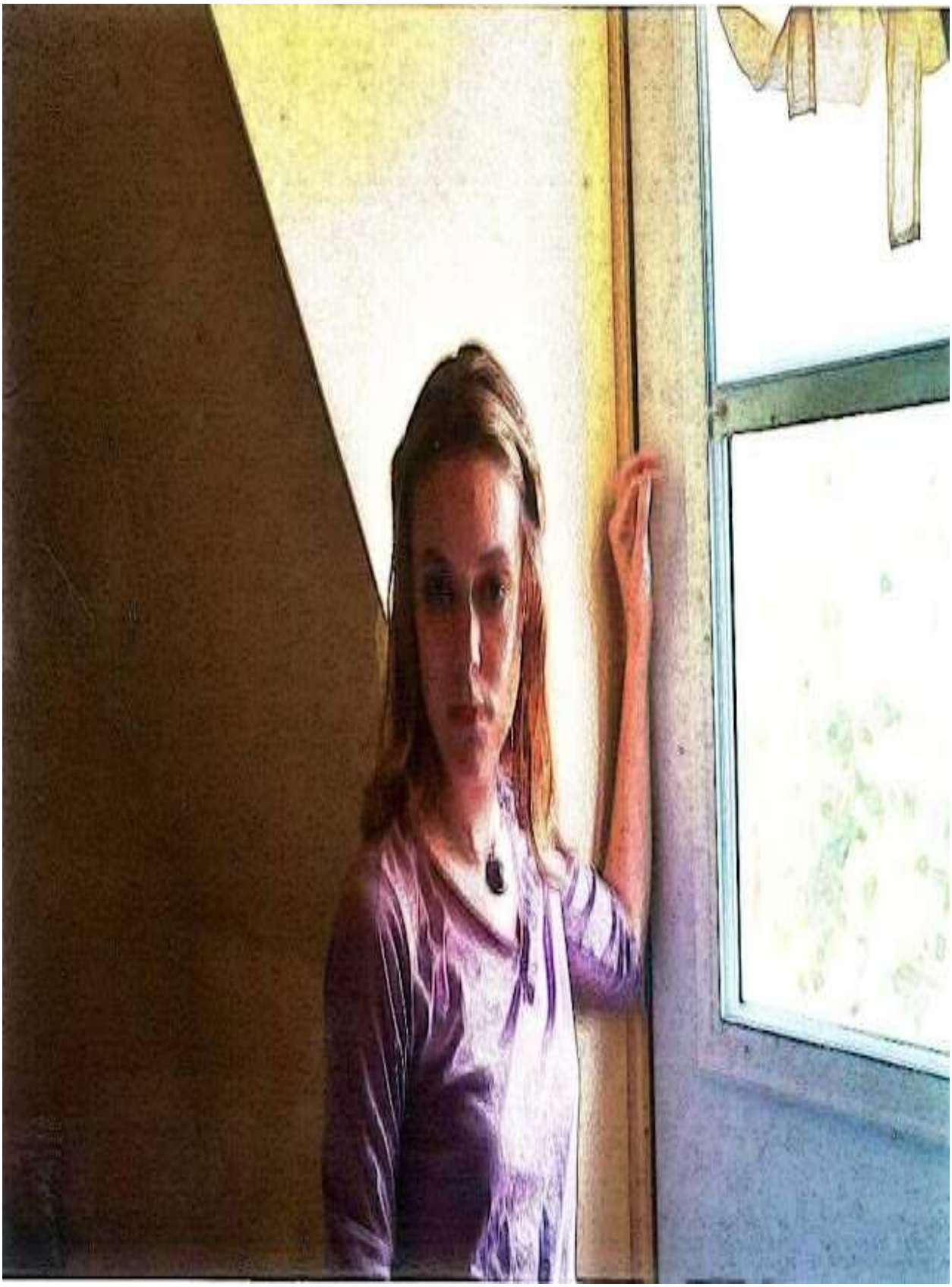

Proven: Two Artists in Montreal
Adam Fieled

Cover image by Adam Fieled
Mary Evelyn Harju in Montreal, Quebec, 2003
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Bloodhounds

It wouldn't have occurred to my brain, still novice in some
respects, that a week in Quebec could deliver Mary and I
the status of ex-pats. The bloodhounds on the train sniffed
at us, I felt, with a hale and hearty sense of jouissance, as if
to say, *here's two live ones*. We were at least circumspect enough
to know, and we did know, as we fished for our passports,
not to try and bring dope. We'd have to get our kicks some
other way in Montreal. This was resented by the bloodhounds,
who saw and knew just how suspect we were, from our quirky
hipster attire to our overly-clever conversations. The bloodhounds,
in fact, grunted when they realized we'd outwitted them. Mary's
big kick, as was not unusual, was her camera, and herself. I was
raw meat— not only did I not realize we were instant ex-pats,
I did not really fathom the potency of pictures, portraits taken in

a foreign country. As the bloodhounds sashayed down the train
line, errant thoughts led them to the conclusion that the blonde,
despite her reasonable passport and lack of dope, knew only too
well how to milk this new place for maximum future-icon wattage.
So, once we settled in on Saint Catherine Street, the camera became
our constant companion, and Mary couldn't have been more hype,
as a visual artist and person, to be backlit Montreal-style. All these
eternities later, the raw meat level of who I was then remains— by
far the most memorable shot happened in our little sub-bed & breakfast,
second-floor garret, in the middle of a morning argument about
whatever. Mary unfolded her extremely rigorous plans for us for
the day, and I objected. I wanted to spend at least one day sitting
in cafes, trying to meet some local artists. To have a good time, in
other words. I snapped the money-shot as she leaned into the window case. Done.

Versailles

Kids we were, moving about in worlds not realized, yet
the big, enfranchised Montreal portrait of Mary demonstrates
just how self-conscious she was about images and imagery.
When I snapped the portrait, in the middle of what became
our Montreal routine, she was as completely in control,
completely in command as she could possibly be. I would
never have guessed— I now imagine the night we arrived
in the room on Saint Catherine Street, Mary's first look around
was where to stand when pictures, portraits could be taken.
This, on a more than semi-conscious level, was her way of
making up to me that the big push towards enfranchisement
would have to be mine. There, in the architectural niche to
the left or the right of the large rectangular (oblong) window-case—
there, vacillating between escape from the pursuit of the male gaze

and defiant (as in her adolescence) confrontation— were she to
make her stand there, adding the contemporary touch of the jade
pendant (looping in the fashionistas), the chiaroscuro of who she
could or could not be in the world would be an unambiguous study
in pristine ambiguities. That calculatedness, on this particular level,
was invisible to me then, as was Mary's tacit acknowledgement to
herself that the long, slow haul would have to be me alone. She
evened the score for herself by doing extra work, which subliminally
made it that our time in Montreal was a working vacation for her.
All that calculatedness also meant that her voice could never stop
ringing in my ears. We would be working together for the rest of
my life, no matter what. The room on Saint Catherine Street not
any more cheerful than anything else, but cheerful for her when
she knew, as I did not, how the portrait would look. Versailles, at least.

Undercurrents

In the usual miscellaneous array of things-that-have-been,
the early Aughts emerge as another time, another configuration.
The idea of the Internet café, passe by the Twenties, was big
then. What Saint Catherine Street had was an Internet café
of sorts, directly across the street from Mary and I's temporary
abode, and also on the second floor. So that, if Mary was tired
out from the day's exertions, and we were, perhaps, waiting to
change clothes and go out to dinner, she would pick up her
sketch book and I would head across the street. The café level
was weak; they didn't have much but candy, candy bars, & soda;
but that wasn't important to me. The big e-mail I remember
receiving in Montreal was from Ted, who I had grown up with
in Cheltenham. Ted, who had a bi-coastal orientation at the time,
but was always interested to hear what had befallen his errant,

unceasingly amusing comrade. Ted heard the entire tale of our
vacation as it had unfolded, and offered a sense of congratulations
for our having arrived, albeit briefly, as ex-pats. As I would read
Ted's missives, I flashed back to being thirteen with Ted at
the Jersey shore. It was all there— the Otherness, the adventure
level of being in a strange place, and I was already precociously
dreaming of blonde goddesses, even as Ted preferred brunettes.
The picture snapped of us, together on a floatation device, returning
from a bout with Atlantic undercurrents— salt on our tongues, we'd
been dunked— was about brotherhood. We took on the ocean together.
Now, we were handling another ocean— marriage. Salt on our tongues,
indeed. Ted thought of me in Montreal with the blonde, remained
laconic about his brunette. I didn't push. But the two grown men
lived with undercurrents we could never have guessed were there, before.

Parc Lafontaine

Being stripped of the rituals and routines which sustained
us, in Montreal Mary and I had no recourse but to face
exactly who we were, individually and reciprocally On one sunny
day, we sat in Parc Lafontaine, and for a good twenty minutes
had nothing to say to each other. We were taxed by being alone
together constantly, not by any sense of fighting. But, as we learned,
there can be an infinite amount of space even between two people
whose lives are entwined, and so it was with us. That, until we
realized, with some dismay, that the Parc Lafontaine bathroom
situation was haphazard. Parc Lafontaine, which looked not unlike
an extended, forested version of Logan Circle in Philly, was a place
meant to be finessed by serious Montreal people who knew the ins
and outs of the place. We were foreigners. Mary grew agitated. She
needed to use the bathroom, having had, if I remember correctly,

too much tea with our breakfast. The wall-like silence was broken
by the panic scenario, a not uncommon one, of the foreigners looking
to take care of their physical mechanisms the right way. We rambled,
scrambled, and lunged into a random lunch/dinner place which
had not yet opened. They were gracious enough to let Mary use
their facility. Oddly enough, the incident brought us together again,
left us in a better mode. But the whole expanse of time in Montreal,
wherein we were locked into each other, I experienced as a Dantean
Purgatorio. It needed to be documented, by ourselves, for ourselves,
that we could hack the rigors of foreign travel, and the disjuncture it
entails. Everything raw and jagged about our relationship would
have to come to the surface— wall-like silences, awkward spaces.
Parc Lafontaine became a tragi-comic reminder of travails begetting
triumphs, adversity become strength. Logan Circle with forests.

Repertoire

In the repertoire or array of arts and tricks developed
by Mary in her childhood and adolescence, only an
onlooker with eagle eyes could distinguish what emerged
as, possibly, the most important one. Mary got off, as they
say, on swings back and forth on paradoxes and dichotomies.
My mind teetered through this terrain about her insides as I
chanted out, through gritted teeth, the abstruse formulas of
the *Bringing Down the Light* ritual I had thoughtfully included
in our luggage. Mary rocked back and forth on our adequate,
if not luxuriant, bed, here in this garret room on Saint Catherine
Street. She was distraught; naked but for her panties; we'd just
seen sights in the neighborhood she found harrowing, a barroom
brawl, the spilling of a pool of actual blood; we were alone in a
foreign country. It jumped up in my blood uncomfortably that Mary

was a sucker for the wasted elegance of a nice, cozy hospitalization.
In a foreign country no less, far from the usual support systems. So, I chanted,
accompanied it with the requisite hand and arm movements, as dictated
by the file I'd downloaded once I'd received the key from the Thelemic
Order of the Golden Dawn. How Mary learned, in an avatar-like way,
to tune in on raw energy frequences, rather than fixating on rituals
that had to focus on Jesus and the Bible, I don't know. It was the sense,
as a girl, that the world inside her, starting with colors and forms, was
just too huge to be encompassed by any one belief or value system.
It was an intense desire for the polyglot fluency of a mind that could
find dichotomies to ride— flesh/spirit, abstinence/consummation—
anywhere. As *Bringing Down the Light* concluded, I noted that Mary
was healed. The raw energy frequency of the script saw us through—
I'd pulled up heads that Mary's repertoire (heathen/believer) held fast.

Flame-Heads

I would learn later in my life, with a sense of tickled
amusement, the term recon folks dish out for blonde
women: *flame-heads*. The lazy, crazy, hazy flame-heads
of the world want everything to be unique, singular,
special. Corresponding with Ted, I flashed back on
another scene from our adolescence, as I went the rigorous
daily rounds with Mary. It was a night in Glenside— we
were doing an extended phone-chat, as we sometimes
did, with a few girls our age, who happened to be stationed
at Oak Summit Apartments, a few blocks away. One was
a blonde, and a queen among blondes, for thirteen-year-olds—
already physically developed, precociously sharp about being
a woman. The other, brunette, was less goddess-ish, but also
imperious about demanding reality from people who talked

to her— a real no-bullshit controller of who was telling the truth
about what, who was being real. The deal was simple for Ted
and I, although the time was a little late, maybe 10:30 pm. We
would crash the Oak Summit apartment— I would take the blonde,
he the brunette. We got, as was not unusual, parent-blocked.
But it was funny to me then, as Mary and I, say, climbed
Mount Royal, or strolled Saint Denis Street, so that Mary could
see a special exhibit there, or toured Christ Church Cathedral,
where Mary disappeared for ten extremely frightening minutes
and was then found again, or sat around on the McGill campus,
that I was specially with the special blonde, just as I wanted,
but that it was not as completely a solution to my health and welfare
as I thought it would be. Ted's penchant for hard-headed practicality
was interesting, too. I would later say: love of *flame-heads* is love of fire.

Jagged

Being cut off from the drugs she used to stabilize and balance her emotions, Mary was a prey to moodiness in Montreal. So much of what we were doing was about seeds planted for our future as artists— all long-range plans Mary had made— that Mary blew off caring about the short-term goal of having any fun or kicking back and seriously relaxing. Credit where credit's due— Mary learned, very thoroughly, her way around Montreal before we got there. Navigating the Montreal subway system was thus easy with her around. Nor was there any dawdling about where to go next— Mary was a cyclone of involvement on that level, and it was all taken from my hands. It's just that, in my youth, I did not understand, and Mary did not bother to explain, the calculatedness of what her camera did, where we went, what we saw in what order and why. And pot not being there to take

the edge off, for both of us, meant that we could hit a jagged interval at any time. What Mary had available as a combo— pills, Klonnies, and no pot— made a cocktail that could run around loose for a whole day, but then crash abjectly into a trance-level stupor not to be untangled. Mary, without pot, was also easily spooked, not just by barroom brawls on Saint Catherine Street but by anything that seemed like someone was sending her bad vibes. The night Mary abruptly gestured for us to leave a random English-language bookstore on the Plateau, I thought she was merely bored, but when I looked closer at her, I understood that she felt someone had made an inappropriate, ominous pass while I had my back turned. Mary without pot could be paranoid. The moments we spent close to the edge just had to be endured, as the seeds that needed to be planted were.

Devil's World

The realer real realities can be pretty frumpy, right?
What God, or tapping into God-force energies, is—
a long, slow haul, in which you have to do everything
for yourself. You want quick action, you go to the Devil.
Quick action will be delivered, but the repercussions will
be negative, and everything you've accomplished will
be erased. Rocks and hard places. Except to say, that when
the days in Montreal ended with us ensconced, it seems to me
that Mary had on her mind, other than pictures, portraits taken
and places visited, the fretful sense, even then, that she should
be with someone else. Someone with more money, more worldly
power. She would choose to note, as she lay there, half-asleep,
that the fresh-faced *David* stud guy, with *David* capacities, who
was (she would have to admit) intelligent, was still a poor

substitute for the right kind of banker or trust-funder, who could
buy her clear passage to the right kind of renown. The depth
of my devotion to her was not in question. The question was
about what it means to live in the Devil's world, in which all
that long, slow haul, God-force energy, is easy to doubt, because
we would all like something more demonstrative, more *rapidamente*.
The noises from Saint Catherine Street, from where we were on
the second floor, weren't that obtrusive, but there were some.
No air conditioning meant I used a wet sponge to help me cool
off. Mary did similarly. If I had more money, of course, she
wouldn't have had to, because we would be staying somewhere
more grandiose. In the Devil's World, the long, slow, God-force
informed haul, which was to be our destiny, is full of doubts.
Mary wanted quick action, not just sex, part of the time too. Good night.

Proven

You might not want to call us scoundrels, for the time we
spent basking in the glow of the foreign. Cheating Montreal
meant being there in the midst of their brief, two-month
summer. Our second-floor garret room, not up to bed
& breakfast level but also private, secluded from any kind
of staff or maintenance person, under the aegis of God
knows what or who, directly overlooked Saint Catherine Street.
No air conditioning; the mornings were sticky. Mary had
a number of brisk mornings in a row, long agendas of where
to go, what to do all day already planned. But on one sultry
morning, she tried to access the fuse-box of purposeful,
assertive day-momentum, and failed. What happened
instead was nothing unusual— the re-consummation of our
marriage, into the exotic earth around and beneath us—

but it changed our dynamic permanently. It always meant
that our thoughts of who we had been and what we had done
together could go skyward at any moment, even once we
were no longer together. There was nothing about who we
had been that could be erased. The consummation ceremony—
slow, languorous, in bright morning sunshine striking
the queen-size bed occupying the center of a space uncarpeted,
wood-slat floors, walk-in shower, no bath (and certainly no
Continental breakfast waiting for us)— did its milestone number.
If it was done Bohemian-style, it was a raw, as usual, version
of Bohemia we channeled. At the end of the day, nothing to
romanticize, just the sense that Mary's camera caught her at
an absolute zenith of body/soul unity, just as she wished.
Our time in bed was a deep breath we took together. And proven.

Absorbing the Mountain

And did she know, Miss H, how dirty it would have
to be, for us to make it in the world? She must've.
Beneath the veil of enfranchised blondeness, a quite
precocious mind. Certainly, she noticed my own moment
of most achieved satisfaction, other than our usual antics—
the climbing of Mount Royal. It was though the nature
forces, who perceived us on our particular hike, rewarded
me, once Miss H's mystical spell had been cast, for years
in which grit and grime would have to stick to every
attempt at success in the literary world, artistic world,
avant-garde, or what have you. I stood on top of Mount Royal
with an epiphany going that was handed to me from
somewhere else. I would be the one to dive into the mud,
appease the squealers and oinkers, amuse the dogs. That's

why Mary submitted to me. For a blistering moment, atop
Mount Royal, it all made sense— what it would mean to be
a man who could provide for my loved ones. Even if being
artists angled us against conventional assignations. Another
hot, sunny day, Mary quiet, after a series of cell phone calls
back to Philadelphia. Me in thrift-store trousers I'd picked
up on South Street, slightly beleaguered here by other
tourists' more conventional attire. Not caring much, a man
living through a moment of having proven again what Mary
and I had proved together— the world could be solid, life
could be solid, and solidity could be imposed on what might
remain gelatinous if not imposed on. Fudging things, playing
dirty, was permissible if the foundational ethos behind it was
solid. This, I learned later. Now, minutes in the sun, absorbing the mountain.

Loner

Chopping into the innards of a spectacular spring day,
I cannot help but wonder at how long its taken me to
get to simple home truths about Mary and I. To see,
really and truly, where the walls were and why they were
there. It would never have occurred to me in Montreal,
for instance, to understand that, if Mary did not share
my penchant for hanging out in cafés, meeting the local
Bohemians, it's because her primordial stance before
the world was not a social one. Behind all the seductive
razmatazz, she was a loner. I'm included, then, in her package
deal, because she's spotted that I have talent. Once
that's established, I become an extension of the idea
that Mary will surround herself with tokens and totems
to reinforce her eventually triumphant emergence in the world.

The drug girls, like Saskia and Maya, came and went. Abby
was allowed to stay because, like me, she became another
talented extension of Mary herself. All the levels of personal
interaction between Mary and I wavered between real intimacy
and the impersonality of me being *David*, the ideal male nude,
who could also sub as a permanent curator for her too, and, most
importantly, a backer for her with more vital energy than she
had. By Montreal, Mary was slightly lost from all the powder
that had gone up her nose. It imperceptibly started to be the case
that she dropped plans to take the East Coast by storm, continued
with me in the hopes, well-founded, that I would never drop her.
She was right: I would not. When we had a photo-strip done at
a photo booth in a random Montreal train station, she was the one
who knew I would make it public. That jade pendant again. Us.

Our Dance

Taking it again to a place which might seem gratuitous,
Mary and I were two elaborate brains in two elaborate
bodies. I can only conjecture, about the texture of Mary's
consciousness, regarding what sexual power I might or
might not have had over her. The anti-panegyric, as it were,
to *David*, Biblical Adam, and the man himself, which
centered on my oafishness, needs to be balanced by Mary's
own implied confession of fragility on several relevant levels.
Mary took wifely time, at least some of the time, to do crafts
work around our marriage. Such as, putting together a hand-
crafted picture book about our adventure in Montreal. As I saw
her doing it, I understood that not every level of Mary's brain
was glued to an unconventional frequency. What stunned me
is that when the book was completed, it was a fait accompli

to hand the book to me for safe keeping. Beneath her painterly
machismo, the photos in the book which could be used to
our advantage had to be bequeathed to me, because Mary
knew, in a world-weary way, that her shakiness rendered her
ineligible to keep the thing. Everything about us to he
consolidated would have to be consolidated by me. Does
consolidation, aesthetic or otherwise, have to be a man's work?
So, over decades, for the oaf with Michelangelo's stud as
a doppelganger, there is also the wry sense that Mary was willing
to admit, out of the side of her cannabis-caressed mouth, that I
was capable of a level of responsibility and responsiveness to
necessity that she was not. All her major photographs, in fact,
were bequeathed to me. She was intelligent enough, canny enough,
to know that if she put me at the center of them, I'd follow them through. Our dance.

Acknowledgements

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